IOWA WATERSHED ACADEMY

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Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy

- Created a common water quality goal and emphasis on the watershed approach
- Identified practices that minimize nutrient loss
- Initiated new projects and partnerships to increase statewide and local awareness and implementation
- Increased awareness of existing projects
Watershed Coordinators

- Watershed project managers
- Variety of backgrounds and experience
  - Agriculture
  - Environmental science
  - Conservation
  - Sales
- Needs vary
  - Location
  - Project goals
  - Partners

Watershed Training in Iowa

- Increased need for watershed coordinator capacity building
- High expectations and focus on the new WQI and existing watershed projects
- Conversations and brainstorming around training development
- Watershed academy concept began to take shape
Needs Assessment

- Water quality and conservation professionals and stakeholders roundtable was held in December 2014
- Representatives from state and federal agencies, agriculture, conservation and environmental organizations and ISU Extension
- Discussed subject matter, available resources and gaps, and potential training structures
- Developed a list of priority topics and subtopics

Priority Topics

- Project management
- Measurement and monitoring tools for practice and project effectiveness
- Agronomics and cropping systems management
- Communication and sales
- Watershed and conservation planning
- Developing stakeholder leadership
- Outreach and education planning
- Evaluation
- Source water protection
Coordinator Assessment

- Conducted a survey of watershed coordinators
- Included topics discussed at the roundtable
- Coordinators ranked topics according to their level of interest and need for each topic

Funding and Goals

- Received an NRCS grant to support training development and delivery in partnership with SWCS
- Increase project effectiveness through
  - Strong understanding of tools and resources available
  - Developing relationships with technical specialists and partners
  - Peer learning
  - Continually evolving and improving to meet watershed coordinator, watershed and state-level needs
- Structured as a two-day hands-on workshop held twice per year
- Workshop presentations and materials posted to the Watershed Resources section of the ISUEO Water Website
May 24-25, 2016
Field Extension Lab- Ames

- Nitrogen management
- Cover crops
- Measurement and monitoring tools
- Effective field days
- Project management

October 20-21, 2016
FFA Enrichment Center- Ankeny

- NRS measurement
- P management
- Soil health tools
- Project management
  - Evaluation
  - Grant writing
  - Social media tools
- Urban practices
- ISA Tour and presentations
- Joint meeting with IA SWCS
May 9-10, 2017
Field Extension Lab- Ames

- Communication techniques
  - Elevator speech
  - Working with the media
  - PowerPoint

- Edge-of-Field
  - Saturated Buffer design and siting
  - Wetlands and bioreactors

October 24-25, 2017
Field Extension Lab- Ames

- Conservation and watershed planning
- Conservation sales
- One Water approach
- Conservation Infrastructure
- Story Maps
- Hydrologic and social assessments
- Cover crops
- Soil health measurement
Evaluations

- Self-assessments on a 1-4 scale
  - Pre-assessments: generally in the needs improvement category (2)
  - Post-assessments: improvement to the proficient category (3)
  - Some exemplary rankings (4) on topics that have been covered at multiple academies or that are more familiar
- Follow-up evaluations indicate lasting value of knowledge gained and topics for future events

Impact

- 25-33 coordinators attend each session
- Conservation staff, farm advisers, and consultants
- Coordinator turnover is decreasing
- Valuable topics and tools:
  - Tools: ACPF, 360 Soil Scan, retaiN kits, saturated buffer and bioreactor models
  - Communication techniques: media training, messaging, social media, and learning from other coordinators
  - Practices: soil health, cover crops, edge-of-field sessions
Feedback

- “You got my mind thinking of other ways to really look at my watershed & maybe expand my focus area”
- “I personally would recommend the Watershed Academy to both new and veteran coordinators alike. I think the training is well done and look forward to future meetings!”
- “Thank you for doing these! They are a great resource for those of us who feel like we were kind of thrown into our jobs without much training.”
- “I believe the academy is a great learning opportunity and the caliber of presenters is great!”

What’s Next

- Ongoing assessments with project coordinators, water quality and conservation leaders, and partner organizations in Iowa
- Build connections with other state-led watershed trainings to develop and share resources
- Continue to expand beyond watershed coordinators to other conservation and agricultural professionals including commissioners
- Seek funding to support training development and delivery
Partners and Sponsors

Thank you!